RAJYA SABHA

Monday, the 6th December, 2004/15 Agrahayana, 1926 (Saka)

The House met at Eleven of the Clock,

MR.CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Saraswati Heritage Project

*61. SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state the progress made in the project on unearthing the Saraswati River Heritage Project?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY): No sanction order in regard to Sarasvati Heritage Project was issued. The Project Report was prepared in September 2003 envisaging a cost of Rs. 36.02 crores, which was reduced to Rs. 4.98 crores as reflected in the financial concurrence accorded on 01.03.2004. This amount was to be met from the regular budgetary provisions.

In anticipation of sanction of the project, six sites were taken up for excavation in the year 2003-04, in addition to three sites which had been taken up earlier. The excavations are in progress.

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, this is the most important project. Normally, there is a practice followed in our country that whenever a new Government assumes office, they will be undoing all the previous projects since they have their own priorities. But here is a project which the former Minister, Jagmohanji, has initiated, and he has done a lot of good work since it has got its own importance. Sir, the unearthing of the Sarasvati River route had a close link with the ancient Harappan civilisation. I would like to know from the hon. Minister the details of the sites excavated so far for exploration work, and the results achieved.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: Sir, as I mentioned in my written answer, the then Government accorded financial sanction on 1st March, 2004 by which time the elections had been announced. The Report as such was prepared only in September, 2003 envisaging a cost of Rs. 36.02 crores, which was reduced, in just three months, to Rs. 4.98 crores. In fact, no Sanction Order was issued. It all confined to files. But as I said, we were taking up excavations, six sites were taken up for excavation in 2003-04. Earlier, three sites has been taken up. Excavations on all the sites will be in progress, and they are in progress. Sir, all these sites, nine, are part of, what may be considered, Harappan Zone. Since Harappa and Mohanjodro are in Pakistan, we wanted to know as an independent India as to whether they were zones in our part of the country, and we did find, we did excavate Dholavera site, to a great extent. We found a lot of archaeological objects which were datable to pre-Harappan, Harappan historical periods. But, Sir, this has nothing to do with the Sarasvati River Project as such. These excavations will go on.

SHRI RAVULA CHANDRA SEKAR REDDY: Sir, my second supplementary is, whether several pre-Harappan sites have been found while exploring the roots of rivers and whether the Archaeological Survey of India would be asked to quicken the work on important heritage projects to build tourist hubs and develop the new places excavated for attracting tourists.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: First of all, Sir, as for tourist hub sites, this is a project taken up by the Tourism Ministry. At the time, Jagmohanji was handling both the Ministries. Therefore, I am afraid, I am not competent to answer the question. However, I said that the work was going on at all the nine sites because we want to know the facts. Nobody should hesitate to know the facts. Facts, in my view, are sacred.

SHRI LEKHRAJ BACHANI: Sir, I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he knows that a very deep and extensive study was done by one Vedic scholar, Shri K.K. Sastri, of Ahmedabad. He is 100 years old. He has recently written a book on "Saraswati". He visited all the nine sites. He has also given some indications in his book. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he or his Department or his Ministry would make a study of the contents of that book and pursue the contents of that book.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: Sir, I have not read the book. The literature so far available does indicate that all these nine sites could be considered

either pre-Harappan or Harappan or historical sites. They are all of high archaeological value. My only appeal to the Members is not to confuse the archaeological value with a particular kind of project.

DR. K. KASTURIRANGAN: Sir, I just want to bring, through you, to the attention of the hon. Minister that the study from space revealed the existence of an ancient riverine system. Whether it is Sarawati or not, it is not important. The second component is that there are conjectures regarding the way it disappeared, including the violent plate tectonic movements in that region. The third component is hydrology, the potential of water, in case the riverine system had contributed to the subterranean ducts. Last one, of course, is archaeology. Any study which is related to the archaeological site excavation should also be suplemented and complemented by the other disciplines and it could be a very nice integrated study of that region from several of these disciplines point of view. I would request the hon. Minister to consider it as a proposal.

MR. CHAIRMAN: I think it is a good suggestion.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: Sir, I take all the facts mentioned by the hon. Member , who is one of our eminent scientists, very seriously. We will think of an inter-disciplinary study. At the moment, we are engaged in excavations. As and when the facts of excavation warrant such a study, we will not hesitate to take up such a study.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Hon. Chairman, Sir, may I ask, through you, the hon. Minister whether the procedure, as I understand it, of finalising sites for excavation is on the basis of proposals from certain stipulated organisations like Universities, State Governments and academic bodies? Then there is the Central Advisory Board which advises the Archaeological Survey of India on the excavation. I would like to know from the hon. Minister as to who mooted the original proposal for the so-called Saraswati River Project to which the question refers. What was the date on which the Central Advisory Board came to this conclusion that these were the sites which were to be excavated?

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: Sir, the then Minister took some initiative in the matter in December, 2002, if I recall correctly. I don't have those dates with me. Later, it was referred to the Central Advisory Board of Archaeologists. They also cleared it. Even otherwise, we are guided by the advice of this Board. I am trying to differentiate excavation from the specific project. As and when the data thrown up warrants such a project, I will certainly commission the project. At the moment, I do not find any need for it.

SHRI NILOTPAL BASU: Sir, the Minister has not answered my question. I want the specific name of the body which proposed it and on the basis of which the Central Advisory Board took cognizance of that proposal.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: The Minister, at that time, formed a Committee with himself as the Chairperson for this purpose and took a view on the file; while no decision materialised in the form of sanction.

DR. KARAN SINGH: The disappearance of the River Saraswati is one of the great mysteries of our archaeology and of our history because from the Sangam, the Ganga, the Yamuna and the Saraswati, सरस्वती अदृश्य हो गई है। Where did it go? How did it go? The Minsiter has said that it is only after the excavation that he would consider an integrated project as suggested by one of the hon. Members. My submission is this. Wouldn't the Minister like to do the two things simultaneously? You can do remote sensing, you can do satellite photography and you can also do excavations so that if there is a link between the disappeared river and the archaeological sites, that can be found. They don't have to come seriatim, perhaps they can go contiguously.

SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY: Sir, the suggestion will be studied. But as of now, we have only found archaeological objects whose dates can be traced to pre-Harappa and Harappa culture. There are certain rivulets now. Beyond that there is not enough evidence to show that a particular river had existed in the past.

उत्तरांचल में प्राचीन धार्मिक स्थानों और मंदिरों की सुरक्षा

*62. **श्री हरीश रावत:** क्या संस्कृति मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) भारतीय पुरातत्व सर्वेक्षण द्वारा उत्तरांचल में जिन-जिन धार्मिक स्थानों और मंदिरों का संरक्षण किया जा रहा है, उनके नाम क्या है;

(ख) क्या उनका मंत्रालय इन स्थानों के संरक्षण और विकास के लिए किन्हीं योजनाओं पर कार्य कर रहा है; और

(ग) यदि हां, तो तत्संबंधी ब्यौरा क्या है और गत दो वर्षों में इस प्रयोजनार्थ वर्ष-वार कितनी राशि खर्च की गई है और वर्ष 2004-05 में कितनी राशि व्यय किये जाने का विचार है?

संस्कृति मंत्री (श्री एस॰ जयपाल रेड्डी): (क) से (ग) एक विवरण सभा पटल पर रख दिया गया है।